



Joint Committee on Appropriations, February 14, 2014

Testimony of Alicia Woodsby, Partnership for Strong Communities, on the Department of Children and Families Budget Proposal

Good afternoon, chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I'm the Deputy Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide nonprofit policy advocacy organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and creating strong communities. The Partnership staffs two statewide campaigns – Reaching Home and HOME Connecticut. Reaching Home is the campaign to build the civic and political will to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut.

I am testifying on the Governor's budget proposal for the Department of Children and Families to request the restoration of the Homeless Youth Program established in Connecticut General Statutes 17a-62a. On December 12, 2014, the Reaching Home Campaign helped to release the state's first comprehensive study and report on runaway and homeless youth developed by the Yale Consultation Center. We know from the study that these children and youth touch multiple state systems with limited levels of obligation or responsibility for their well-being. The Reaching Home campaign created a public-private partnership to implement Opening Doors-CT, a statewide framework to prevent and end homelessness based on the federal Opening Doors plan. The primary focus of the campaign is on people who are chronically homeless, veterans, families with children, and youth. Part of the scope of our planning is to develop long term proposals for a comprehensive response to the issue of youth homelessness. However, based on the study that was completed and presented in December, we now have a better understanding of the need for an immediate crisis response for runaway and unaccompanied homeless youth. The necessary structure for this response already exists through the Homeless Youth Program in state statute with an established Request for Proposals (RFP), so that resources and support can quickly reach the ground level.

Unaccompanied youth who are homeless are an invisible population particularly vulnerable to the deprivations and consequences associated with homelessness. Connecticut's first study quickly identified 98 unaccompanied youth who were homeless in Hartford, New Haven, New London, and Bridgeport. 32% of the kids in the Study had dropped out of school; 23% of these youth first had sexual intercourse at age 12 or under; 50% were arrested at least once in their lifetime; and about half of the young people reported family contact with DCF. These young people had experienced multiple traumatic events, including rape, being attacked with a weapon, and the murder of a close family member or friend, among others. 25% of these kids considered suicide over the prior year.

Separate from this study, Waterbury alone identified 40 youth who were homeless in just two days.; and in one year, Connecticut street outreach programs provided 5,414 youth with food. The need for intervention is critical. Only 4 Connecticut private agencies provide crisis housing intervention, respite



services or street outreach with only 15 shelter beds statewide for youth under 18 years old. None are in Hartford. Research suggests costly and avoidable trajectories for youth who experience homelessness who are known to be at risk for sexual abuse, being lured into prostitution, physical abuse, criminal justice involvement, illness and suicide.

Connecticut must address the immediate safety needs of youth and young adults in housing crisis, and can take a critical step in that direction by restoring the Homeless Youth Program.

Restoring the funding for this program would allow the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to establish two regional teams to provide outreach and a drop-in component, including youth drop-in centers with walk-in access to crisis interventions and ongoing supportive services, for youth who are homeless.

I am available to address any question.

Thank you very much.